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RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY 1459
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0837
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 0524
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1540
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFAAA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY 1022
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY 0935
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2585
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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR S-ALEC ROSS FROM AMBASSADOR RICHARD HOAGLAND
STATE ALSO FOR R, P, SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, EUR/RUS, EUR/CARC,
EUR/UMB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PROP](#) [PINR](#) [KPAO](#) [RS](#) [ZK](#)

SUBJECT: NEW TIMES REQUIRE NEW METHODS FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

REF: A. MOSCOW 839

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 835

[1](#)C. 08 ASTANA 2353

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) As the Obama Administration moves to implement the policy objectives determined by the Afghanistan-Pakistan strategic review, and also works on the U.S.-Russia relationship, it would be useful to reconsider public diplomacy practices and ask if we are effectively communicating our views in the former Soviet Union. As I have reported since at least 2004 when I was Ambassador in Tajikistan, I think we are not. Since the beginning of the Putin era, Russia has insisted on zero-sum thinking vis--vis the United States, asserting that its "near abroad" (the former Soviet republics, especially in Central Asia) is its special or privileged sphere of influence. The great majority of the population in Kazakhstan and elsewhere in Central Asia receive their news and information from television, including to a large degree Russian television. Thus, the Russian political world-view, including anti-U.S. black propaganda, predominates. The most recent egregious example was the so-called documentary, The Base, that aired in prime time on April 5 on Russian national channel Rossiya-TV. The main idea of The Base was that the Americans are intent on conquering Kyrgyzstan, or possibly the whole region, and treat the local people like dirt.

[1](#)3. (SBU) After a decade of falling resources for U.S. public diplomacy, the United States has a difficult time making its views known in the Russian-speaking world that covers 11 time zones for over 200 million people. The current Russian-language Washington File is welcome, but the amount of material is much too limited, generalized, and lacks up-to-the-minute policy specificity. While a Russian-language service of a respected international broadcaster like CNN or the BBC would be ideal, that's not likely to happen any time soon.

[1](#)4. (SBU) However, the explosion of interactive social media

provides another option for the United States to tell its story and set the record straight in the Russian-speaking world. Admittedly, Internet penetration, especially in Central Asia, is still relatively low. However, government officials (including close monitoring by intelligence agencies), journalists, civil society and other opinion leaders, and the younger generation in particular, are Internet savvy. For example, the Kazakhstan National Public Opinion Survey of February 2009 shows that the Internet has grown to be the primary source of political news and information for 22% of the population (61% cite Russian TV stations). You-Tube, FaceBook, and their Russian-language equivalents are increasingly popular. Almost every Kazakhstani media outlet has its own web site and encourages readers' comments. Prime Minister Karim Masimov has established his own blog (journalists frequently report the current issues being discussed) and has instructed the other ministers to establish their own blogs. Text messaging and even Twittering are increasingly popular among the young.

15. (SBU) Embassy Moscow reports it is on the eve of launching its own networking sites, www.openamerica.ru that will be linked to LiveJournal on which the Embassy will post videoblogs and short features on educational and cultural events of the Embassy. This is a welcome development. Moscow also reports it monitors the Russian blogosphere and sees much discussion of U.S. policies and issues, but rarely any response or participation from us.

16. (SBU) It seems to be an opportune moment for the Department to establish a full-fledged, multi-(new)media Russian-language web site. While the focus would be on the

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U.S.-Russia relationship and developments in Afghanistan, other key policy issues, including U.S. economic leadership, should be highlighted. To attract more users, especially the young, daily "soft-power" features should be included. While this would take some investment, we believe that the enhanced policy bang for the buck would be well worth it.

17. (SBU) Such a web site would accomplish a number of purposes. It would, in part, provide the transparency the Government of Russia says it wants from us, it would communicate broadly with government officials and private individuals, and it would have a real multiplier effect, since journalists through the former Soviet Union would likely quote from it.

18. (SBU) To establish a pilot project, Embassy Astana would be pleased to host a public diplomacy FSO for one year over-complement to coordinate closely with the other Missions in the region to develop a public-diplomacy strategy for this kind of new web site and, war-room-like, to monitor closely the Russian-language web sites available and the other mass media. We would envision this officer feeding Central-Asia-specific content advice and analysis to the Department-based web site.

19. (U) Embassies Ashgabat, Bishkek, Dushanbe, Moscow, and Tashkent have approved this proposal.
HOAGLAND